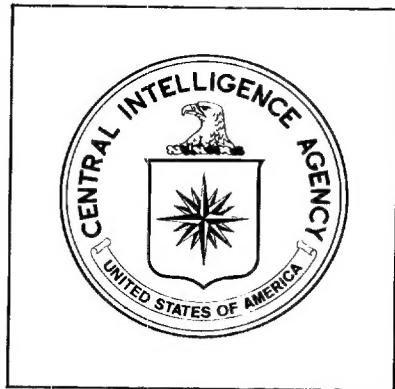


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**Middle East
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MIDDLE EAST - AFRICA - SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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Palestinians

Hint of Moderation Toward Israel

Yasir Arafat and other moderate leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization appear to be moving cautiously toward a public acceptance of Israel. By using second-level spokesmen and vague language, they are attempting to make the minimum concessions necessary to win the Palestinians a role in negotiations without prematurely alienating their many skeptical and more radical colleagues.

This week the PLO representatives in London, Said Hammami, wrote in a news magazine that some form of "mutually acceptable coexistence" might in time be developed between Israel and a Palestinian state. Hammami suggested that if the current settlement efforts result in the establishment of some kind of Palestinian entity, the PLO could pursue its ultimate "dream" of a secular Palestine by non-violent and evolutionary means.

This is the most forthright public statement so far by the PLO, but the Palestinians' willingness to recognize formally and live in peace with Israel is still only implicit in Hammami's statement. As a result, Israel will be unmoved. Tel Aviv will refuse to negotiate with the Palestinians until they explicitly recognize Israel's right to exist and forswear terrorist attacks on Israel.

Although Arafat reportedly approved Hammami's statement, he is unlikely to defend it publicly or make any more explicit concessions unless he receives something substantial in return. Arafat would probably be removed from his post as PLO chairman if he were to recognize Israel without receiving reciprocal Israeli and US recognition of the PLO.

The PLO's governing executive committee almost certainly looks on the Hammami statement and those like it made by PLO officials in Beirut as trial

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balloons to which the organization's prestige should not be attached. The PLO officially denied responsibility for a similar statement made by Hammami in April 1974. At that time, his proposals for coexistence with Israel were condemned by the Palestinian press and ignored by Israel. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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India

Prime Minister in Court

Prime Minister Gandhi apparently lost little political ground as a result of her courtroom testimony on March 18 and 19 in response to long-standing charges that she engaged in illegal campaign activities during the 1971 parliamentary election. Her appearance, which had been ordered by the courts, may even help dilute public criticism that she considers herself above the law.

The case has been in and out of the courts since it was presented four years ago by a little-respected socialist politician whom Mrs. Gandhi handily defeated in her home constituency in Uttar Pradesh State. Press commentary indicates Mrs. Gandhi, during six hours of testimony, effectively handled almost all charges, including that of exceeding expenditure limitations. The weakest part of her defense was her response to charges that a government employee in her secretariat simultaneously worked as her chief election agent--a clear violation of Indian law.

The court's final decision is not expected before August, and possibly not until 1977. A guilty verdict would nullify Mrs. Gandhi's 1971 election and prohibit her from seeking public office for six years, but most political observers in New Delhi expect the final judgment will at most admonish politicians and legislators to institute electoral reforms. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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